



FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

(RECRUITMENT & HIRING/RESOURCES/REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION)

Success Stories (By OPM)

John V. Wright, Jr.
Meteorologist-in-Charge
National Weather Service

John V. Wright, Jr. has been the Meteorologist-in-Charge of the Weather Forecast Office in Blacksburg, Virginia since arriving there in 1994. He currently manages a staff of 24 meteorologists, hydrologists, and hydrometeorological technicians. Wright was born with cerebral palsy, which affects his walking gait and speech. When he was first hired, despite holding a Masters degree, his manager was uncomfortable with working with someone who had severe muscle spasms. Fortunately, the Director assigned him to another project that enabled John to gain respect of his co-workers. Just recently, he has begun to use adaptive software. A program called, "Naturally Speaking" enables him to speak to his computer and the computer translates his spoken work to text at a rate of up to 150 words a minute. Mr. Wright has over 26 years of experience with the National Weather Service. In the early 1990s, the Weather Service began installing Doppler radar at designated test facilities. He was chosen to oversee the implementation of the radar in Goodland, Kansas, then selected to manage a second Nexrad Radar office in Blacksburg, Virginia. He has given more than 450 presentations and has trained more than 2,000 SKYWARN observers to be volunteer severe weather spotters. His awards include the National Exceptional Specific Prediction Award; the Department of Commerce's Bronze Medal, and the Administrator's Award from the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Mr. Wright believes that his employment with the National Weather Service has helped him achieve career success in the field of meteorology and more importantly, in life. He feels that having cerebral palsy has made him look to other avenues in life that might have otherwise been of less importance.

RoseAnn Ashby
U.S. Department of Education
Branch Chief in the Rehabilitation Services
Administration

My name is RoseAnn Ashby. Have been employed at the U.S. Department of Education since 1987. Currently, I am a GS-14 Branch Chief in the Rehabilitation Service Administration, an agency within the Department primarily responsible for funding and overseeing the vocational rehabilitation program.

I am blind and use a computer equipped with a screen reader with speech output to enable me to review and edit the work of my staff. I have had access to accessible computer technology since 1990 when our agency first began equipping professional staff with personal computers. I also use the services of a reader-assistant. She reads documents to me that are not available in electronic format; helps me with such tasks as copying, faxing, and filing; and performs tasks on the computer requiring more complex Word skills than I possess or utilizes software with which I am unfamiliar (e.g. Excel).

Prior to my having a personal computer adapted with speech, I had to do all of my writing by typing documents on an electric typewriter or dictating my work to a reader; this was a burdensome process. With the advent of accessible computer technology, I now find that I am as efficient and productive as any employee with sight, and I am considered a high performing staff member of the agency. I am responsible for supervising a 15-member branch, the largest branch in the Rehabilitation Services Administration.

I received a Master's Degree in Community Counseling from the University of Miami in 1981. I worked at a center for independent living in Miami, Florida for six years. Desiring a major change in my life, I then applied for employment with the Federal Government in the Washington, DC area. I was hired as a GS-12 in 1987 under the Schedule A excepted appointment authority for hiring individuals with disabilities. My agency is particularly interested in hiring qualified individuals with disabilities because the programs that we administer provide training and employment for adults with disabilities. I converted to career status when given the opportunity. When I applied for my GS-13 in 1990 and my GS-14 in 1995, I competed for the position and maintained my regular career status.

I am very positive about my employment with the Federal Government. I believe my work is rewarding, and I feel valued by the organization employing me. I do not believe my disability is a barrier to my success on the job.

Sheri Denkensohn
Senior Counsel
Department of Health and Human Services,
Office of Inspector General

I am pleased to say that my experiences as an individual with a disability have been positive throughout my Federal career. I am a quadriplegic as a result of a diving accident that occurred when I was 16 years old. I moved to the Washington D.C. area in 1989 to attend law school at the Georgetown University Law Center. Beginning with my very first Federal Job as a summer intern in 1991 at the General Services Administration (GSA), Office of Inspector General, and most recently during the 4 years I have been employed at the Office Inspector General at Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), management has provided me with the reasonable accommodations necessary to be successful and productive in my work. I attribute this success to one basic fact-effective communication between management and myself.

My own experience with reasonable accommodation at HHS began during my transition from OPM to my position as an attorney in the HHS Office of Inspector General. Once I accepted the job at HHS, my supervisor called to discuss a start date. It just so happened that the entire office space for my division was in the process of being renovated. To alleviate the disruption and difficulties associated with my having to move from office to office during construction, my future boss, and I agreed that it would make sense for me to begin working at HHS after the renovation was completed.

The other accommodation that I requested was voice-activated computer software. Advances in assistive technology, such as voice activation, have made it much simpler and cheaper for agencies to accommodate disabled workers. My first voice-activated software program, purchased when I worked at OPM, cost close to \$5000. The newest voice technology cost the agency less than \$500. This technology, which was no more difficult to load onto the computer than a standard software program, enables me to work faster and smarter, goals that all agencies are looking for employees to achieve.

Soon thereafter, to ensure that the appropriate accommodations would be ready once I began my new job, I was asked to meet with my supervisor, facilities personnel, and the architect to look at the floor plans to select the most accessible office. Through this interactive process, I was able to select an office that met my needs (it did not have a narrow corridor and was close to the elevator). At that meeting, I had the added opportunity to talk about the other accommodations that I needed. I brought measurement with me so I could provide information about appropriate desk height. I also requested an automatic door for my office that would lock automatically when closed and had a switch that would allow me to keep the door open during the day. I explained that this design would permit me to independently operate the door without having to ask for assistance. In addition, an automatic door design would mean that I would not have to restrict my hours to those when other office personnel were present. What I wanted was the ability to arrive early and work late!

It is important to note that the process of making reasonable accommodations does not end once an employee requests an accommodation and that accommodation is made. It is an ongoing process, which may depend on the nature of an employee's disability, advances in technology, and/or changes in an employee's job duties. For instance, after I began working in the Cohen building I realized that the elevator buttons were too high for me to reach and I had to request assistance to travel to and from the fifth floor. With the strong support of management, a special strip of lowered buttons was added to each elevator allowing me to enter and exit the elevator independently. I am now able to use the elevator independently both during the day when there are other employees present and on the weekends when elevator traffic is much more limited. Another important accommodation recently made available is a wheelchair accessible van. This van transports disabled employees to HHS related meetings and functions within the District and surrounding areas.

MacArthur Crawford
Computer Assistant
Social Security Administration (SSA)

MacArthur Crawford is a Computer Graphics Specialist and a Computer Support Person with the Social Security Administration (SSA). Mr. Crawford has muscular dystrophy and uses a motorized wheelchair. He has very limited use of his arms. His first job entailed producing a log, keying one character at a time on a basic personal computer. In addition, he manually produced graphics. Mr. Crawford was provided one of the first voice recognition computers on the market in 1992. It incorporated a hands free telephone. He has also been provided a special scanner, disk drive, mouse, printer, and assorted software items. As technology improved, the capability was upgraded and ultimately, the entire configuration was replaced. His current job entails tracking materials using a database and making service telephone calls for software supplies when necessary. He also produces weekly status reports, charts, graphs, and training materials. He designs logos and flyers for the SSA and conducts other agency-wide activities. He performs most of his work in a "hands-free" environment with the equipment and training SSA provides.

Craig Enoch
District Manager
Social Security Administration (SSA)

Craig Enoch is the District Manager of the SSA office in Medina, Ohio, a small community south of Cleveland. Small communities have historically presented problems for people with disabilities because they progress more slowly meeting regulatory obligations in areas of accessibility. He is amazed at how accessible and openhearted the community of Medina is towards him. He was born with Osteogenesis Imperfecta (commonly known as broken bone syndrome). Mr. Enoch uses a wheelchair and does not let anything deter him from living life to the fullest. He vividly recalls setting out for Chicago to train for his Claims Representative position with SSA, and staying in a hotel that housed more guests than lived in his hometown of Rossville, Indiana. Mr. Enoch never envisioned he would achieve the level of success he has and credits SSA for supporting him throughout his career. He moved from training in Chicago to a position at Merrillville, Indiana, then to Kokomo, Indiana, then Springfield Illinois. While in Springfield, the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law. He feels the ADA has influenced his personal life more than his professional life. Despite the birth defect that has caused him to endure 200 broken bones, he has lived a very fulfilling life. In recent years, he has tried para sailing, snow tubing, and (most recently) snow skiing on a bi-ski. He feels that the ADA has brought awareness to the general public that has led to many opportunities for the disabled.

Alice Gottschling
Computer Assistant
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

Alice is a computer assistant at the National oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) David Skaggs Research Center in Boulder, Colorado. She has genetic disorder that destroyed her central vision. Legally blind, she depends entirely on peripheral vision. Her personal computer is loaded with special software that enlarges the images being produced on other software programs and has audio capability. With this program, she is able to download and disperse budget data by computer to various labs in the Boulder Area and nationwide for processing. Her financial data processing responsibilities require interaction with various levels of NOAA's organizational structure. Ms. Gottschling also uses a reader (Closed Circuit Television, CCTV), a machine that magnifies and projects the images from paper on to a color monitor to read mail and other documents. Before obtaining the reader, she was dependent upon someone else to read to her. Ms. Gottschling began her Federal career in 1970 with the National Bureau of Standards as a summer aide. She continued employment on a variety of limited appointments in the excepted and competitive service while earning her degree in Elementary Education from the University of Northern Colorado. In 1994, she was one of two national winners of the Department of Commerce's seventh annual Federal Employee Award for the Accessible Computer Technology (ACT) VII Exhibit.

Bobby C. Stewart
Traffic Management Specialist
General Services Administration (GSA)

Bobby Stewart is a Traffic Management specialist in the Traffic Operations Staff at the Southwestern Distribution Center in Fort Worth, Texas. In 1974, Mr. Stewart was paralyzed from the waist down as a result of a motorcycle accident. He is a wheelchair user. He drives to work every day and makes frequent visits to General Services Administration (GSA) warehouses in the Fort Worth area. He came to work for GSA as a Freight Rate Trainee. Although his starting salary was considerably less than the disability compensation he was receiving under Social Security, he was willing to make this sacrifice in return for the opportunity to work in his chosen field with the potential for advancement. One of the highlights of Mr. Stewart's career occurred during the early 1980s when the Federal government deregulated the common carrier trucking industry. Consequently, the industry produced rates that were difficult to manage and understand. He was a key member of a team that worked on a program called the Standard Tender of Service (STOS), establishing a uniform method through which motor carriers can provide transportation services to civilian government offices. The STOS simplified the entire tender process. Mr. Stewart has received various awards over the years including the Delta Nu Alpha Outstanding Transportation Student in 1978, the Federal Executive Board's Distinguished Service Award in 1983, Outstanding Cost Effectiveness Accomplishments in 1991, and a GSA Customer Service Award in 1999.